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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR CA/EX, CA/FPP, CA/VO, AND EUR/SCE (MIKE FOOKS); DEPT ALSO
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MARLA BELVEDERE

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TAGS: [KFRD](#) [CVIS](#) [CMGT](#) [CPAS](#) [ASEC](#) [BK](#)

SUBJECT: Sarejevo FPU talks to local grassroots leaders in Northwest
Bosnia

REF: Sarajevo 000857

¶1. [Summary] The Sarajevo Consular Fraud Prevention Unit(FPU)
recently visited two adjacent towns in northern Bosnia, Prijedor and
Sanski Most. FPU was interested in contacting the relevant
representatives of ethnic minorities to better understand our visa
applicants and their migration patterns. We learned that few
minorities that have left, have returned, and that these communities
face demographic and economic issues that complicate their ability
to survive. (End Summary).

¶2. In Prijedor, a town that is now predominantly ethnic Serb, our
FPU met with a young Serbian Orthodox priest. The Orthodox priest
covers several villages in the Sanski Most municipality, located in
the Federation. The priest explained that only three of 25 Orthodox
churches in the Sanski Most area survived the war. All other
Orthodox churches were burned down and destroyed. The priest said
only 420 families remain in the villages he tends. This is
substantial decline from pre-war numbers, as there were ten times
more worshippers in 1991. Only 30 of the remaining Serb families
are young couples, and most of the others are elderly people. There
are only 10 children among the 420 families, reflecting the new
reality that the majority of couples with children have moved to
Republika Srpska.

¶3. Most funding for the church comes from the displaced Serbs, and
not from the congregation members themselves. Therefore, although
donors moved to areas like Banja Luka, northern Serbia or Germany,
they still invest in rebuilding the churches in their home town.
The municipality of Sanski Most recently donated 10,000KM to the
local Orthodox church. Due to the weak municipal budget the church
cannot expect more.

¶4. Officials in both municipalities we met with claimed to have met
all standards and quotas for assisting in the return of property to
pre-war owners. However, despite the official estimation that 7,000
of 30,000 Serb residents have returned to their homes in Sanski
Most, the priest was very skeptical about these figures. He
explained that some people expressed their wish to return only on
paper, in order for their devastated homes to be repaired by state
or international funds. However, once their homes were repaired,
many of them chose not to return. Rather, they sell their old
family property to local Bosniaks. The priest stressed that safety
is not an issue any more. Rather, the economic situation and lack
of jobs is often behind people's decision to leave.

¶5. While the Orthodox priest told the story of displaced Serbs reluctantly returning to their homes in a now Bosniak-majority area, we also heard from Bosniaks in the Prijedor area. One Bosniak we spoke to holds a high-level position in the Prijedor municipality. Another is a returnee to an outlying village, who started a local political party to address returnee concerns. The village is Kozarac, informally known as the "Srebrenica of the West." Kozarac was the site where experts believe 4,412 Bosniaks were killed or missing in 1992. FPU met with the president of a newly-formed local political party to discuss the issue of Bosniak returnees to the Prijedor region. While Kozarac has a high returnee rate, Prijedor proper is struggling to keep its Bosniak returnee population. The Bosniak municipal official we spoke to is a prime example: originally from Prijedor, working in Prijedor, but choosing to live in Sanski Most and commuting to work.

¶6. Our discussions with these two communities outline the story of ethnic displacement and the ongoing attempts to resettle. Many of the displaced persons went to the EU and US. While these individuals remain attached enough to their homeland to send money and to rebuild mosques and churches, few are willing to return permanently. Many displaced persons who found their way to the United States generate consular work as they are the invitees of a large number of Sarajevo's visa applicants. Firsthand knowledge of the living conditions and issues faced by these minority groups will undoubtedly impact officers' decision making when interviewing applicants from this region.

English